Interventions to reduce school bullying perpetration and victimization are effective

Bullying is a ubiquitous form of aggression in schools worldwide. Intervention and prevention programs targeting school bullying perpetration and victimization are effective, yet more research is needed to understand variability in effectiveness.

The main findings of our review are that anti-bullying programs were effective in reducing bullying perpetration outcomes by roughly 18-19% and bullying victimization by roughly 15-16%. There are substantial variations in effects, and the reasons for these variations require further research.

What is this review about?

This review provides an updated synthesis of school-based anti-bullying programs. Bullying amongst young people remains a prevalent form of aggression, and research has shown it can lead to many negative life outcomes, for both bullies and victims.

Bullying is defined as aggressive behaviors that occur repeatedly over time between two or more individuals. Typically, there is a clear power imbalance between victims and bullies, either socially or physically. Furthermore, bullying behaviors are those that are committed intentionally to harm the victim.

What studies are included?

To be included in this review, primary studies must have evaluated a specific intervention program that targeted bullying perpetration and/or victimization outcomes in school-aged children, i.e., typically between four and 18 years old. Studies must have used two experimental groups of children, one that received the intervention, and one that did not, and applied quantitative measures of bullying behavior (perpetration and/or victimization) that coincided with our operational definition of bullying.

The effectiveness of anti-bullying programs is an important finding with implications for public health and educational policy.

What is the aim of this review?

The aim of this review is to summarise findings from studies of the effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying programs in reducing both bullying perpetration and victimization will be reported. The review summarizes 100 studies, with the largest number being from the USA.
Our final meta-analytic review includes 100 studies of the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs. The largest number of studies came from the USA, with most other studies from Canada and Europe.

**What are the findings of this review?**
Anti-bullying programs are effective in reducing bullying perpetration outcomes by roughly 18-19% and bullying victimization by roughly 15-16%.

Variability in the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs was associated with differences in methodological designs, types of programs and geographical regions. Interventions evaluated using age cohort designs collectively gave the largest overall effect for both bullying perpetration and bullying victimization.

Limitations of the results are similar to those of previous reviews; for example, the reliance of self-reported measurements of bullying may suggest the change is in reports of bullying perpetration/victimization and not behavioral change.

**What do the findings of the review mean?**
The findings indicate that school-based bullying intervention and prevention programs can be effective in reducing both bullying perpetration and victimization, although the effect is, overall, modest.

The effectiveness of anti-bullying programs is an important finding with implications for public health and educational policy. However, our review did identify that there are variations in the effectiveness of intervention programs. Future research is needed to explore the reasons for these variations.